

Communication within the Special Education Process

Individualized Education Program (IEP) meetings and other school meetings are crucial parts of a child's education program. A parent's responsibility extends beyond giving consent and accepting explanations. Asking questions, bringing up issues to discuss, gathering information, and clarifying points are all part of a parent's role in the special education process.

Effective communication is two-way, generating the understanding and support the professionals and the parents all need to make effective decisions about the child's educational program. Communication involves listening as well as speaking. Listening gives information and data that you can use in developing an appropriate program for your child.

Things to consider when someone else is talking:

- ▶ Listen to see if the speaker is expressing an opinion or if data is being shared
- ▶ Show that you are listening, such as make eye contact and lean forward
- ▶ Take notes on what you hear or invite a friend to do this for you
- ▶ Allow the speaker to finish or you might miss important data that can have an impact on your child's program
- ▶ Ask for data that supports what a person is saying
- ▶ Ask questions or restate what you heard if you need clarification

Things to consider when you are talking:

- ▶ Keep the focus on your child
- ▶ Be prepared, and if needed, write your questions down ahead of time and bring them with you
- ▶ State your issues and concerns clearly. Communicate in an honest and direct manner.
- ▶ Direct your comments and questions to the person who can address or answer them the best
- ▶ Restate your concerns if you feel you were not heard the first time
- ▶ Be confident in pursuing the appropriate educational program for your child

Communication can also be in written form. It is important to determine what method works the best for you and the school. Will your method of communication be handwritten notes, email, voicemail, or text? The group should also consider the frequency of the communication.

Written communication could include:

- ▶ A home-to-school notebook provided daily with written communication between you and the school. Keep it brief and ask for what your child needs.
- ▶ Meeting notes and follow up notes. Ask if someone is taking notes prior to the start of a meeting and request a copy of them.
- ▶ Phone logs to help keep track of important conversations
- ▶ Formal letters. Be sure to send it to the appropriate person and focus on the main issues or concerns you have.

The key to effective communication is preparation and a willingness to be actively involved in planning your child's education. Working together as a team is important and is supported through effective communication. Work as a team to find solutions. The goal should be to provide an appropriate educational program for your child.